

# Exalting Jesus Christ

## "Healing at a Distance"

### INTRODUCTION:

- I. Statistics show that most Americans can expect to live about 78 years.
  - A. Of course, that number is only a statistical average.
    1. But the good news is that the number is gradually increasing due to advances in medical science.
    2. Heredity also plays a role in one's life-expectancy.
      - a. Most in my family lived into their mid-80's, and some to their mid-to-late 90's.
  - B. But statistical tables don't always work out the way we hope.
    1. For example, we all expect to have to deal with the death of our parents someday – and for some of us, we've already experienced that loss.
    2. But how many of us expect to have to deal with the deaths of our children?
      - a. My parents suffered that loss before I was even born.
        - (1). My 2 ½ year old sister died needlessly during minor surgery at the hands of an intoxicated doctor who ordered

the anesthesiologist to give her more ether than she could tolerate.

(2). She never regained consciousness.

b. And my brother and his wife also suffered the loss of their twenty-seven year old son who died years ago after fighting a long, hard battle against leukemia.

3. And in almost every congregation I've worked with over the years, there have been mothers and fathers who have lost a child. This congregation is no exception.

II. As we come to the last half of the fourth chapter of John, in our series "Exalting Jesus Christ," we find the touching story of a father who was struggling with the gut-wrenching news that his critically ill son was about to die.

A. This is the story of a father who pleaded with Jesus to save his son from a ravaging fever that would soon snuff out the life of his son.

1. But what makes this story so unique is not so much that Jesus healed the boy, but that Jesus performed this miraculous "Healing At a Distance."

B. As we take a closer look at this wonderful story, there are five things I want us to notice – some of these are similar to the things we noticed in our previous lesson about the Samaritan woman.

1. First, let's look at "The Setting" where we find all the details that make the story of this miraculous healing stand out.
2. Second, let's take special notice of "The Conversation" between Jesus and the boy's father, which tells us a lot about this man's trust and faith in the Lord.
3. Third, I want us to notice "The Reaction" of all the people who were impacted by this event.
4. Fourth, I also want you to notice "The Comment" John made about this event.
5. And finally, I want us to take a look at "The Application" of this moving account of Christ's compassion, and what it really tells us about Him.

**Body:**

- I. As we go back to consider "The Setting" of this story, we soon realize this is the second miracle of Jesus that John records in detail.
  - A. This miracle involved the healing of the son of a "nobleman" – or as other translations call him, "an official" or "a royal official."
    1. The word translated "nobleman" or "royal official" comes from the Greek "basilikos" – meaning "the king's man."
      - a. Obviously, he was a person of prestigious rank. He was probably one of Herod's trusted officers.

- b. But his rank means nothing to him now. His son's life is at stake.
  - c. And so, consequently, he doesn't go to Herod; he goes to Jesus – the very source of life.
2. It's amazing how often infirmity and the threat of loss – especially loss of life – draws people to Christ faster than prosperity and wealth.
- a. But sometimes that's what it takes. C.S. Lewis once wrote:  
"how hard it is to turn our thoughts to God when everything is going well with us."
3. He's so right. In fact, the most dangerous time in a person's life – from a spiritual perspective – is when they are riding the crest of popularity and success.
- a. We tend to become self-sufficient, thinking our success is all our own doing, and fail to realize it's a blessing from God.
  - b. That's when we often let our guard down, and leave ourselves susceptible to Satan's attack.
  - c. No one knew this better than King David. It was while he was riding the crest of popularity and success that he stepped out on his rooftop one evening and happened to see a woman by the name of Bathsheba bathing – and the rest is history.

- B. But there's something else that is very significant about this miracle.
1. **John 4:46** – *So Jesus came again to Cana of Galilee where He had made the water wine. And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum.*
    - a. Capernaum was a sizable fishing village on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee.
    - b. From the other gospel accounts, we learn that Jesus would eventually spend much of His time in this city when He was not on the road preaching the gospel of the kingdom.
    - c. In fact, Jesus actually performed many miracles here during His three-year ministry.
    - d. Because of its strategic location on the highway to Damascus, Capernaum was not only home to one of Herod's top government officials in Galilee – the nobleman - there was also a Roman detachment assigned to the city.
    - e. And to promote good will between the Romans and the Jews of Capernaum, history tells us the Roman commander built a beautiful synagogue there as his gift to the people of the city.
  2. However, what makes the mention of these two towns so significant is that Cana of Galilee, where Jesus had performed His first miracle, is some twenty miles away from the town of Capernaum.

- a. Jesus will demonstrate His divine power and Godhood by healing a young boy from a distance of some twenty miles.
  - b. In the miracle of turning water into wine, Jesus demonstrated His power over creation and time.
  - c. But in this miracle, Jesus will demonstrate His power over disease and distance.
- II. But, as we take a closer look at "The Conversation" between Jesus and the nobleman, we learn a lot about this man.
- A. Anyone with children can certainly sympathize with this troubled father.
    - 1. **John 4:46b-47** – *And there was a certain nobleman whose son was sick at Capernaum. 47 When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death.*
    - 2. Do you notice the word "implored" (or "imploring") in verse 47?
      - a. The imperfect tense of the verb in the Greek suggests a continuous action.
      - b. In essence, it means this nobleman kept imploring – or begging – Jesus over and over again to come down to Capernaum to heal his son.
  - B. Even though we can certainly sympathize with this father's sense of urgency, we shouldn't overlook a subtle, but important, point.

1. The nobleman not only presented Jesus with his need, he also told Jesus how to handle it.
    - a. Like so many of Jesus' followers, the nobleman apparently thought Jesus had to be right by his son's bedside to take care of this situation.
    - b. And so, he pleaded with Jesus to leave Cana and come to Capernaum.
  2. How many times have we made similar requests? How many times have we fervently prayed for God to do something for us, and then not only told him how we want our prayer answered, but when?
  3. How much better it would have been for this father – and for us – to simply lay his problem at the feet of Christ and allow Jesus to handle it His way.
- C. As we listen to Jesus' response, we might feel, at first glance, that He comes down awfully hard on this desperate father.
1. **John 4:48** – *Then Jesus said to him, "Unless you people see signs and wonders, you will by no means believe."*
  2. Before we judge the Lord's response too harshly, we need to understand that a "circus-like" atmosphere was developing around Jesus.

- a. Throngs of people had been coming to Jesus since the day He performed a number of unnamed "signs" in Jerusalem during Passover.
  - b. In fact, when word reached Jesus that the Pharisees were taking notice that Jesus was drawing more disciples than John the Baptist, Jesus left Judea and returned to Galilee.
  - c. But even here His fame was following. Jesus was the miracle-worker of Galilee!!
  - d. However, the reply of Jesus was not so much to his desperate father as it was to the thrill-seeking, miracle-expecting crowds that were gathering around Him everywhere He went.
- D. But the persistent, perhaps tearful, pleading of this broken father finally won him a hearing before the King of kings.
- 1. **John 4:49-50a** – *The nobleman said to Him, "Sir, come down before my child dies!" 50 Jesus said to him, "Go your way; your son lives."*
  - 2. Why didn't Jesus simply honor the man's request and travel the 20 miles to Capernaum?
    - a. We don't know. We're not told.
    - b. But it may have been that Jesus wanted to simply stretch the faith of the nobleman – and allow John to use this event to illustrate an uncommon faith in Christ.



(1). Standing beside Jesus at his son's bedside, and watching Lord heal his son, would certainly show faith in Christ.

(2). But to believe that Jesus could heal his son from a distance of 20 miles – without actually seeing it happen – takes a great faith!

3. It's these examples of unparalleled faith that are given to increase our own faith in the power, the might, and the deity of Jesus Christ.

III. But this story is incomplete until we learn something about "The Reaction" of those mentioned here.

A. First, look at the reaction of the nobleman.

1. **John 4:50b** – *So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way.*

a. The nobleman followed the Lord's instructions and went on his way.

b. But let me show you something hidden in the Greek rendering of this text that reveals a lot about this man's faith in Jesus.

2. At first glance, we might assume that the nobleman hurried back to Capernaum.

a. But the Greek verb for "went his way" (or "started off" as other versions render it) is the word *pureuō* (pure-RAY-o) – which

simply means "to go one's way;" implying to go one's way  
"without haste."

- b. From this we can infer that he left the presence of Jesus absolutely assured that the Lord's words were true – his son lives! And in that promise, the nobleman's faith rested completely.
3. In fact, from the verses that follow, it seems the nobleman may have even stayed in Cana overnight before returning home.
  - a. **John 4:51-52** – *And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!" 52 Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him."*
  - b. From this we gather that it was the next day when the nobleman began his 20 mile journey back home – only to be met by one of his servants on the way.
4. The journey would have taken an average person only 4 to 5 hours to walk from Cana to Capernaum, especially if they were in a hurry to get there.
  - a. But if the healing took place at the seventh hour of the day – or 1pm in the afternoon – this man could have easily been home before nightfall.

- b. However, since his servant greeted him on the road the following day, that indicates the nobleman had such confidence in the promise of Jesus that he didn't start out to return home until the following day
  - c. Now that's REAL FAITH!
- B. But also notice the reaction of the servant.
1. **John 4:51** – *And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, "Your son lives!"*
  2. Obviously everyone in the household knew the nobleman's purpose for going to Cana of Galilee.
    - a. He was going to find Jesus and ask Him to heal his son.
    - b. The fame of Jesus was already spreading throughout the land from news of the signs and wonders He had performed in Jerusalem, and now many were believing that He may very well be the Messiah.
    - b. But when the fever of the nobleman's son had broken at the seventh hour, and the boy's father had not returned that evening, a servant was sent out the next day to find him and tell him the good news.
  3. But, once again, there is subtle hint of the servant's reaction hidden in the tense of a Greek word in these verses.

- a. The imperfect tense of the verb "*saying*" in verse 51 indicates continual action – something done over and over.
  - b. Apparently, the slave was repeatedly saying, "Your son lives!" "Your son lives!" "Your son lives!"
4. Here was a man who was excited beyond description.
- a. I can imagine this man almost jumping for joy as he repeatedly shouts, "Your son lives! Your son is alive! He lives!"
  - b. And the miraculous healing of that young man had a tremendous impact on this servant: "*he himself believed*" **(John 4:53)**.
- C. But it's not just the slave who was so deeply moved to believe in Jesus by this miracle, the nobleman's entire household believed in the might, the power, and most likely the Messiahship of Jesus.
1. **John 4:52-53** – *Then he inquired of them the hour when he got better. And they said to him, "Yesterday at the seventh hour the fever left him." 53 So the father knew that it was at the same hour in which Jesus said to him, "Your son lives." And he himself believed, and his whole household.*
  2. And I doubt it stopped there.
    - a. How long do you think it took for the members of the nobleman's household to tell this story to everyone they knew in Capernaum?

- b. I can only imagine the news of this "healing from a distance" spread like wildfire throughout that coastal town.

IV. But John has a footnote to add to this story in his "Conclusion."

A. John wraps up the story of the royal official's son with sort of an "editorial comment" in verse 54.

1. **John 4:54** – *This again is the second sign Jesus did when He had come out of Judea into Galilee.*

a. The first sign Jesus did was turning water into wine – but that was done while Jesus was in Galilee before He came to Judea and Jerusalem to celebrate Passover (**cf. John 2:1-10**).

b. But when Jesus arrived in Jerusalem, He performed other signs:

(1). **John 2:23** – *Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did.*

(2). Nicodemus had seen some of these signs: **John 3:2** – *This man came to Jesus by night and said to Him, "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him."*

2. But this was the second sign which Jesus did that is recorded in detail.
    - a. Not only that, but this is a sign recorded by John so that we *"might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and believing [we may] have life through His name"* (**cf. John 20:30-31**).
    - b. Plus, this sign was done after Jesus left Judea and had returned to Galilee.
- V. But the lesson would be incomplete unless we can make an "Application" of the things we read here.
- A. There's no question about the fact that this moving story tells us many things about Jesus.
    1. The story certainly speaks about the compassion of Jesus for this father and his dying son.
    2. But even more than that, this story gives proof of the Lordship of Jesus Christ over disease and over distance.
      - a. He not only healed a boy of a fatal illness, He did so from a distance of approximately 20 miles.
    3. That should not only convince us of His deity, but it should also convince us that He cares about sickness and suffering, and that

He can do something about it – even from the distance of heaven itself.

a. All we need to do is simply come to Christ with our requests – like this father did – but, unlike the father, we should leave our concerns at the feet of Jesus to do whatever is in keeping with His will.

4. I can't explain why some prayers for those who are sick and dying seem to go unanswered – except to say there is generally some unseen good that eventually comes out of those situations.

a. Even when it seems our prayers were not answered, and we lose someone dear to us through sickness and death, there may be a blessing in all that – if we only look for it.

B. But there are also a lot of things we parents can learn from nobleman – especially those of us who are fathers.

1. Like this nobleman, a faithful father should never be too proud or too independent to admit his needs.

a. This father didn't hesitate to go to Jesus and ask for help during this crisis.

b. He wasn't some superhero – some stoic pillar of independence and strength – he was vulnerable and honest.

2. And like this nobleman, a faithful father should never be too busy to be involved in the lives of his children.

- a. This father didn't send his wife. There was no, "Honey, can you take care of this; I've got a lot of work stacking up at the royal office?"
- b. He went himself. That tells me this man was involved in his home – he was involved in his son's life.
- c. Fathers, I can't emphasize enough how important it is to be involved in your children's lives – every day of their lives - especially when it comes your child's spiritual nurturing.
  - (1). **Ephesians 6:4** – *And you, fathers, do not provoke your children to wrath, but bring them up in the training and admonition of the Lord.*
- d. I can pretty much guarantee that a family where the Christian father takes little or no interest in his children's spiritual welfare, is a family where the children will most likely grow up taking little or no interest in their own spiritual welfare either.
- e. I've seen it happen too many times.

## **CONCLUSION:**

- I. I've never experienced the loss of a child – and frankly, I don't know how I would handle that experience. I pray I never have to find out.
  - A. But if that ever happened, I know one thing.



1. I know my daughters would take with them the memories of a father who loved them and cherished them with all his heart, and the memories of a dad who loved and faithfully served the Lord – even when going through some of the darkest days of insufferable emotional pain and heartbreak.
  2. That's what they would remember.
- B. In his book *"The Effective Father,"* Gordon MacDonald tells a true story about a father – it's *"The Story of George Jaeger"*:
1. "When George Jaeger took his three sons and his elderly father out on the Atlantic Ocean for a fishing trip, he had no premonition of the horror he would face in a matter of hours. Before he would step on shore again, Jaeger would watch each son and then his father die, victims of exhaustion and lungs filled with water.  
  
The boat's engine had stalled in the late afternoon. While increasing winds whipped the sea into great waves, the boat rolled helplessly in the water and then began to list dangerously. When it became apparent that they were sinking, the five Jaeger men put on their life vests, tied themselves together with a rope, and slipped into the water. It was 6:30 p.m. when the sinking craft disappeared and the swimmers set out to work their way toward shore.

Towering waves and a strong current made swimming almost impossible. First one boy, and then another – and another . . . swallowed too much water. Helpless, George Jaeger watched his sons and then his father die.

Eight hours later, he staggered onto the shore, still pulling the rope that bound the bodies of the other four to him.

'I realized they were all dead – my three boys and my father – but I guess I didn't want to accept it, so I kept swimming all night long,' he said to reporters. 'My youngest boy, Clifford, was the first to go. I had always taught our children not to fear death because it was being with Jesus Christ. Before he died I heard him say, 'I'd rather be with Jesus than go on fighting.' "

[McDonald continues...] Performance under stress is one test of effective leadership. It may also be the proof of accomplishment when it comes to evaluating the quality of a father. In that awful Atlantic night, George Jaeger had a chance to see his three sons summon every ounce of courage and self-control he had tried to build into them. The beautiful way they died said something about the kind of father George Jaeger had been for fifteen years." (*The Effective Father*, Gordon MacDonald, pg 13)

C. Fathers, is that how your children would face death?

1. Would they face it with the full assurance that to depart would mean to be with Christ, which is far better?

a. Would they have the confidence that heaven is their home for an eternity – because you've taught them and because they've seen that same kind of faith in you?

II. Regardless of your past mistakes or failures, the good news is that the Lord is offering you a future.

A. While the enemy wants to keep you cowering in the shadows of past failures, the Lord has other plans.

1. He wants to free you from the past, and bring you into the light of His grace and mercy.

a. He wants to heal you from all those past wounds and bring lasting joy and peace into your life.

2. But for that to happen, you first need to surrender your heart and life to Jesus Christ.

B. You see, distance is no barrier to God. He can bring emotional and spiritual healing into your life all the way from heaven.

1. For some of you, it means coming to Christ in obedience to the gospel – surrendering your will to His by coming in faith, repenting

of your sins, and being buried with Christ in baptism to have your sins washed away.

2. For others, it means coming to Christ in genuine repentance, and simply asking for God to forgive you of all your past mistakes and failures, and restore you to the kind of man or woman you were the day when you were washed clean by the blood of Jesus Christ.
3. So, if there is a need for emotional or spiritual healing in your life, then come to Jesus as the nobleman did and simply lay your deepest needs at His feet.